

TO: The Members of the Education Committee (c/o Chris Calabrese)

REGARDING: Raised Bill No. 5425 – or HB 5425

SPECIFICALLY: The Passage that would shift the burden of proof in hearings that seek a “Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)” onto the family of a child and away from the school district.

I am Robert Perske the author of 18 books on securing positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities in our society. Among them are *Hope for the Families* (1981) and *New Life in the Neighborhood* (1980). I also assisted in producing a Report to President Nixon, *Mental Retardation: Century of Decision* (1976) and full authorship for another: Report to President Carter (*Mental Retardation: The Leading Edge, Service Programs that Work* (1978).

I have focused on this issue for 51 years. During that time the fairness and decency toward persons with disabilities led to a wonderful upward growth. We, in Connecticut, have moved from merely shoving persons with disabilities out of sight and out of mind in institutions -- until the present. when they are slowly being admitted in their own neighborhood schools. During all of these years, I have watched how parents, workers in the field and citizen advocates have had to push a gigantic boulder up a very large hill. They did it in spite of formidable opposition.

But now, if the school districts do not have to produce the burden of proof in due process hearings, and they can shift it on the parents, that would be a terrible impediment to the evolving standard of decency that marks the progress of our maturing society.

Voting for this passage would amount to a terrible step backward for persons with disabilities and their parents.

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